



THE 1929 ROMANIAN NAVY PROCUREMENT PLAN

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After the partial implementation of the procurement program for 1926-1927, the command structures of the Romanian Navy worked diligently to promote some naval procurement projects to meet the defence needs of the maritime coasts, in particular. The next such plan from a chronological point of view was drafted in 1929. It focused, among other things, on building bases to accommodate the forces of the Sea Division, one somewhere around Constanța, and the second one at the mouth of the Danube.

Concretely, in 1929, the ship requirement was modified somewhat compared to the one planned in 1924, in the sense that it started from the need to have four destroyers available at any time, in other words, there had to be eight such units in the equipment, as some would inevitably have been under repair and others needed for reconnaissance missions. To support an ultimate collision with larger enemy ships, the Romanian Navy wanted at least one fast cruiser.

However, the Romanian Navy did not receive any new ships until close to the outbreak of the Second World War, if we do not take into consideration the submarine "Delfinul", commissioned in 1926.

Nevertheless, we consider that the different points of view of naval specialists, concentrated in the 1929 naval plan, were valuable in terms of the crystallisation of some options of unitary acquisitions in the following decade, when the worsening of the international situation required the revision of Romania's naval policy.

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STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES FOR THE NEW PROGRAM

In the period from 1924 to 1929, there were many studies on the best structure for the Romanian fleet. While they did not change the basic structure adopted in the naval plans of 1921 and 1924, they added new information from the analysis of similar fleets of comparable states (Isbășescu, 1928).

To prevent incidents like that of Tatarbuniar in 1924, the Inspectorate General of the Navy wanted to prevent any Soviet attempts to land on the coast of Bugeac. After a training trip of the members of the General Staff of the Navy in June 1928, many lessons were learned about the maritime defence of the coasts and the Danube Delta, which was the aim of this trip. For example, it was determined that the most vulnerable area was that of Gibrieni on the southern coast of Basarabia in the event of a large-scale Soviet landing operation. Another area at risk, which could only be considered for a diversionary landing attack, was Balabanca, south of Gibrieni, but also in the Tatarbuniar area (AMNR, file 512/1928, p. 23).

These conclusions indicated that the Romanian navy, although vastly outnumbered by the Soviets, was nevertheless capable of preventing an enemy landing on the seacoast. The Soviet High Command was thus aware that it had to eliminate the threat posed by the Romanian fleet before attempting a landing. Since the Soviet submarines could not operate in the waters of Basarabia because of the shallows there, the Romanian Navy needed other early warning systems, namely fast small ships and seaplanes.

These new concepts did not change the main reasons for the programme established by the Inspectorate General of the Navy, which opted for a balanced navy, but there were some nuances to be taken into account. As for the destroyers, 8 of them were considered the minimum required, 4 for pursuing enemy lines of communication and defending the coast, 2 as reserves and another 2 for protecting coastal bases and their own inner lines. They were to be supplemented

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In a 1929 memorandum addressed to the War Department, entitled "Explanatory Memorandum for Our Naval Programme", the then Commander of the Navy, the Inspector General of the Navy, Vice Admiral Scodrea, took stock of the naval programme to date and drew some conclusions about the measures needed to achieve a minimum standard of efficiency that seemed achievable both internally and externally in the new situation.

by two light cruisers capable of taking on the Soviet cruisers. As for the submarines, at least six units were considered necessary to properly monitor the movements of the enemy fleet, survey routes and attack enemy convoys. The reconnaissance system had to be supplemented by seaplanes. Although the chapters on coastal defence and naval air forces were only briefly mentioned, it was noted that coastal defence had to be able to engage enemy ships at a range of 20-30 km, which meant that 152-203 mm guns were needed. Of course, the coastal defence had to be supplemented by other detection and reconnaissance elements, such as searchlights, direction finding and acoustic detection devices, etc. The last defence element, at least when it came to the Black Sea, was sea mines. The Romanian Navy needed about 2000 mines for the sea barricades (Ibid.).

In 1929, the Inspectorate General of the Navy submitted several reports to the Ministry of War on the status of the implementation of the naval programme, and some changes and adjustments were made to the new economic and political context of the country. In a 1929 memorandum addressed to the War Department, entitled "Explanatory Memorandum for Our Naval Programme", the then Commander of the Navy, the Inspector General of the Navy, Vice Admiral Scodrea, took stock of the naval programme to date and drew some conclusions about the measures needed to achieve a minimum standard of efficiency that seemed achievable both internally and externally in the new situation (Rohart, 2018, p. 318). It was in fact a reconsideration of various factors, be they geostrategic, political, etc., that had serious implications for the naval programme. Some of the ideas analysed were the same as when the naval programme was developed in 1924, such as the USSR being the main adversary of the navy in the Black Sea, but other features that led to the earlier conclusions were different and the new analysis concluded that the equipment plan had to be divided into tranches for a maximum of 12 years and, on the other hand, that it was necessary to increase the combat power of the navy, both on the Danube and in the Black Sea (Rîşnoveanu, 2011, pp. 168-169).

The tasks of the Romanian Navy remained essentially the same, i.e. the protection of its own lines of communication and the cutting of enemy lines, as well as the defence of maritime and riverine borders (AMNR, file 834/1931-1932, p. 937). In the years preceding the 1929

Naval Development Plan, studies raised the problem of the small size of the fleet, which, even on a superficial analysis, was insufficient to guarantee the security conditions of the country's territorial waters (Bălescu, 1928, p. 9). According to some authors, the strength of a naval force depended on two factors: mass, i.e. the material strength of the naval units, and mobility, which is more difficult to explain but broadly concerns the speed and autonomy of ships and their operational capability (Isbăşescu, p. 11). Anticipating the events in the Black Sea during World War II, it was considered that the elimination of the naval power of a country superior in resources did not necessarily mean the destruction of its fleet in a direct confrontation, but could be achieved by hindering action and freedom of movement. The second variant was precisely due to better mobility of the numerically inferior forces, which could manoeuvre around the opponent's ships and prevent them from taking relevant actions (Ibid., p. 12).

From these general guidelines emerges the nature of the tasks that the navy had to perform in the event of armed conflict, differentiated according to the geographical area in which it had to fight. On the Danube, for example, the naval forces were to perform the same tasks as in the First World War, i.e. support the flanks of the land armies, force river crossings, prevent the enemy from landing and destroy the enemy flotilla (AMNR, file 834/1931-1932, p. 937). At that time, it was confronted to some extent with a possible Soviet offensive in the territory of Basarabia, which could have challenged the enemy's mastery of the lower course of the river and its estuaries; in this case, it was recognised that the Danube Division could be in trouble, especially if the enemy introduced ships from the sea. The greatest problem to be solved was the replenishment of mine and material supplies for the static defences, for the naval forces available – 7 monitors and 7 river gunboats – could carry out defensive actions without having to be reinforced by costly new acquisitions. For these reasons, it was necessary for the river sector to repair the monitors, which had reached their limits and were in urgent need of repair, and to buy seven new gunboats in several stages. In addition to these additions to the floating material, special attention was to be paid to reinforcing the fixed defence forces, i.e. replenishing mine stocks, securing the ammunition of the coastal artillery and acquiring more searchlights (Ibid., p. 938).



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The situation was different for the naval division, because the doctrinal principles adopted by the Romanian Navy from the experience of the First World War pointed to the need for a unified development of all naval forces, i.e. surface ships as well as seaplanes and submarines (Ibid., p. 942). The arguments put forward in favour of this idea were based on the notion that an open confrontation with the vastly superior Soviet fleet was unthinkable; the enemy ships would have to be surprised and the forces distributed. With this in mind, but also in order not to be surprised in port, our fleet needed an effective reconnaissance service, consisting of aircraft and submarines, to be able to scout the enemy bases.

COMPONENTS OF THE NAVAL PLAN

The main problem that had been looming for some time was the construction of naval bases to house the naval division forces. The Inspectorate considered that one base should be built near Constanța and the second at the mouth of the Danube (Ibid., p. 942).

In 1929 the need for ships was somewhat altered from the 1924 planning in that the driving idea was to have four destroyers available at all times, i.e. there had to be eight such units, as some were inevitably in repair and others were needed for reconnaissance missions. To support a possible clash with the enemy's larger ships, the navy needed at least one fast cruiser. In an article published in 1927, Commander Vasile Năsturaș, then Chief Engineer at the Naval Arsenal in Galați (Moșneagu, 2006, p. 337), advocated the standardisation and simplification of the types of ships that the Navy would have to build in the future, as the skeleton of our future Black Sea fleet would have to consist of destroyers and light cruisers (Năsturaș, 1927, p. 284). As a standard model, he proposed the 6-7,000 tonne cruiser, the so-called "Corsair", a high-speed cruiser armed with 152 mm guns and torpedo tubes.

A year later, thanks to the British naval mission led by Admiral Reginald Henderson, the Romanian Navy was offered some variants of British cruisers originally designed for Portugal by the "Vickers-Armstrong" company, but also offered for Romania. At the same time, Romania was offered through official channels two official variants

designed by the British Shipbuilding Directorate, the second of which was a light cruiser of 5,700 tonnes. The "Vickers-Armstrong" variant was similar, at 5,700 tonnes. Armament consisted of six 152-mm guns, four 102-mm guns, an anti-aircraft machine gun and four triple torpedo tubes (Friedman, 2010, p. 193). Previously, "Vickers" had proposed the project numbered "805", which was originally intended for Portugal but was rejected. The cruiser was an enlarged variant of the "Cassandra" class, 137 metres long, 13 metres wide and with a tonnage of 4,820. The armament consisted of six 152.4-mm guns, two 76-mm guns and two torpedo tubes (Ibid.).

Another project, also by "Vickers", numbered "808", was based on the same "Cassandra" class cruisers with some modifications. The variant proposed for Romania was first considered by the Dutch Navy, but after their rejection, the Romanian Navy was the next potential customer. The cruiser design had a tonnage of 5,150 (138 m/14 m) and a speed of 29 knots, achieved by oil engines. Armament was to consist of ten 152.4 mm guns in twin turrets, two 102 mm guns and four triple torpedo tubes (Ibid., p. 195). In addition to these surface ships, there were ideas to complete the naval plan with nine submarines, four at the beginning and another five in 8-9 years (AMNR, file 834/1931-1932, p. 943).

Apart from the cruiser designs, which ultimately did not come to fruition, in terms of fixed defences the programme included 152-mm or even 203-mm batteries to ensure a firing range of 20-30 km. Also seaplanes and no less than 1,500 mines for barrage (Ibid., p. 944).

As Vice-Admiral Scodrea pointed out, it was important to take the first steps and build up a nucleus of naval forces around which the future fleet would be grouped and which would make it possible to prepare personnel for the new ships to be commissioned (AMNR, file 834/1931-1932, p. 943). At the time of 1929, this nucleus of ships did not yet exist; the Navy had two destroyers and two others that were almost completed. The first, the "Mărăști" and the "Mărășești", had been commissioned in 1916 and were clearly getting on in years. As for the light forces, 4 gunboats, 3 torpedoes and 4 submarine motorboats were already considered almost unusable, as they "no longer had any value, were worn out and had obsolete weapons" (Ibid., p. 945).



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Commander Vasile Năsturaş was also of the opinion that a small number of cruisers, possibly only two units, should be ordered first, which together with the new destroyers (*“Regele Ferdinand”* and *“Regina Maria”*) could form the core of the fleet. This was the so-called *“tactical combat and manoeuvre unit”*. After its formation, the navy could concentrate on the naval bases, submarines and Danube monitors for the river units (Năsturaş, 1927, p. 301).

To this end, the idea of a balanced navy with fast cruisers, destroyers, submarines, anti-submarine vessels, mine hunters, coastal batteries and naval aviators was reaffirmed. These memoirs resulted in a naval plan that superseded the plan of five years earlier and was divided into several tranches. In the first three years, the first part of the programme consisted of 2 cruisers, 2 destroyers, 2 submarines, 6 anti-submarine stars, 4 minesweepers, 1 minelayer, a 305-mm battery, 1 210-mm battery, 2 152-mm batteries, 1 90-mm anti-aircraft battery, 500 barrier mines, 100 submarine bombs, 4 searchlights, 4 mobile radio stations, 3 radio locator stations, 3 coastal locator stations and minesweepers for 4 ships (AMNR, file 834/1931-1932, pp. 949-950). The total sum of these acquisitions, including the first instalments for the establishment of the naval base, amounted to 2,3 billion lei (Ibid., pp. 949-95).

Before this first stage, however, it was necessary to complete the material of the existing units, such as converting a torpedo boat into a target ship, refitting some guns, replacing warheads, completing the equipment of the naval arsenal and repairing some ships, at a cost of 117,950,000 lei (AMNR, file 834/1931-1932, p. 950).

The second stage of the naval plan (4-7 years) included two destroyers, another 500 mines, two anti-aircraft batteries, two 210-mm coastal batteries, three 152-mm coastal batteries, a floating dock, supplies for the artillery ammunition, a second stage for the naval base, four motor boats for the Danube Division and two searchlights, for a total of 1,925,000,000 lei.

In the *“third emergency category”*, i.e. over a period of (7-10 years), the Navy was to receive a fast cruiser of 5,500 tonnes, two destroyers, four attack submarines, one mine submarine, six submarine vessels, 12 torpedo boats, 3 motor boats for the Danube, 500 mines and invest another 300,000,000 lei for the naval base, with a total amount of 3,030,000,000 lei.

In the long term, i.e. between 10 and 20 years, i.e. until about 1950, two more cruisers, eight destroyers of 1,800 tonnes, eight submarines of 650 tonnes, two mine submarines of 810 tonnes, a minesweeper, an aircraft carrier with 12 aircraft, a training ship of 3,500 tonnes and the completion of the naval base were estimated, making a total of 8,000,000,000 lei. The total cost of this major twenty-year naval project was over 15 billion lei.

From our point of view, of particular importance was the planning of the purchases for the next nine years, which in practice represented the period until the onset of the second world conflagration, since, from the beginning of the '30s, the rearmament of revisionist states had become evident. Thus, the Naval General Inspectorate aimed to have in 1939 two light cruisers of 5-6,000 tons, two groups of destroyers, i.e. 8 units of 1,700-2,000 tons, 12 submarines (7 attack ones, and 5 mining), 12 torpedo boats, 8 coastal batteries with 75 mm to 280 mm guns, 1,000 mines, 2 mobile T. F. S. stations, 8 searchlights, 3 submarine listening posts and 3 shortwave direction finding stations, plus 12 squadrons at Vâlcov, Sulina and Constanţa (Ibid., file 348, p. 213).

If the acquisitions follow the course indicated by the Inspectorate General of the Navy, the naval division must have by 1940 two cruisers, 12 destroyers, 16 submarines, 10 anti-submarine vessels, 12 torpedo boats, 1 training ship, 1 minesweeper, 4 gunboats, 3 large torpedo boats, 1 supply ship, the brig *“Mircea”*, and 2 tugs. Together with the ships, the static coastal defence was to be equipped with a 280 mm, a 210 mm, a 90 mm A.A. and 2 152 mm. The crew strength of this large unit was to reach 412 officers, 535 foremen, and 4,285 sailors (Ibid., p. 213).

The Inspectorate also identified various options for financing this ambitious project. Three variants were considered, the first two being considered more likely due to financial constraints, while the third, although ideal in terms of benefits, was more difficult to achieve in practice. The simplest solution was to provide a special loan for the navy, with a country with sufficient maritime industrial capacity and good relations with Romania as a possible ally. The loan could be completed in three years at an annual rate of 850 million lei.

The second variant, somewhat more difficult to implement, was based on the idea of granting a concession to a foreign shipyard in the area of the Romanian Navy's naval base. This shipyard would have



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The Romanian Navy did not receive any new ships until almost the beginning of World War II, except for the acquisition of the submarine "Delfinul", which was ordered as early as 1926. However, the various viewpoints of naval specialists summarised in the 1929 Naval Plan were valuable in crystallizing some variants of unit procurement in the following decade, when the deterioration of the international situation required a revision of Romanian naval policy.

received annual ship orders under the naval program, financed from budgetary and extraordinary funds. Due to the inherent difficulties at the beginning of the existence of this shipyard, the delivery pace of the ships would have been cumbersome due to the circumstances, and the supervisor did not consider it possible to reach the ten-year target for the second part of the naval program.

The third solution, the most interesting, was in fact a synthesis of the two, proposing to order the first tranche of the program in an allied country, with payment in three years, as in the case of the first variant, but with one difference. A clause would have been included in the contract, according to which the shipyards in that country would have been obliged to build a shipyard in Romania, in the naval base, during that period, with all the equipment, in order to continue the realisation of the naval plan. The total amount and the annual instalments remained the same, namely 850 million lei per year. The advantage in this case was twofold, because, on the one hand, time was gained by implementing the first stage according to the program, and on the other hand, the foundations could be laid for a maritime industry, which Romania urgently needed, and the amounts spent could be returned to the country to a large extent.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, however, any purchase depends on the general economic situation, and the Romanian Navy did not receive any new ships until almost the beginning of World War II, except for the acquisition of the submarine "Delfinul", which was ordered as early as 1926.

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